

# Catholic Conference of Ohio

9 E. Long St., Suite 201, Columbus, Ohio 43215

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September 1, 2006

Legislative Leaders  
Ohio Governor, House & Senate  
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Ohio Legislative Leaders,

I write on behalf of the Catholic Bishops of Ohio regarding our concerns over the proposed illegal immigrant enforcement legislation being developed in the Ohio General Assembly. We ask that you create a study commission to recommend state responses prior to pursuing specific legislation.

The Catholic community has many shared experiences with immigrant workers throughout Ohio. We are heartened by the fact that the Catholic faithful in parishes across the state have welcomed newcomers and joined with them in solidarity through prayer, service and community life. Unfortunately, we have also witnessed over the past several months an increase in prejudice and incidents of violence towards many immigrant workers. We believe the proposed Ohio illegal alien enforcement legislation will be harmfully provocative during this time of heightened rhetoric regarding immigration policies. We believe it is primarily the role of the federal government to address comprehensive reform that will provide just and humane solutions throughout our nation. We fear that state-by-state responses will not adequately address the extremely complex issue of immigration policy.

Our Church's mission in assisting and standing with immigrants flows from our belief that every person is created in God's image. Indeed, in His own life and work, Jesus called upon us to "welcome the stranger," for "what you do for the least of my brethren, you do unto me." (Mt. 25: 35, 40). In 2001, the Catholic Bishops of Ohio issued a statement calling for persons of goodwill to stand in solidarity with Ohio's immigrant workers. The statement, *God's Welcoming Presence: A Call To Stand In Solidarity With Ohio's Immigrants*, emphasized the vital contributions immigrant workers, regardless of their legal status, provide to our communities and our state's economy. The statement called upon state officials to undertake a study that would carefully review the complexities of this issue and bring together, in open discourse, the many persons and organizations directly affected by immigration.

We believe the proposed Ohio illegal alien enforcement legislation, with its emphasis on arrest and deportation, lacks the careful study needed to fairly address this issue. We encourage state leaders to reconsider this proposal. We believe further discussions with interested parties, including federal officials, business leaders, religious leaders and worker representatives, should occur prior to proposing actual legislative language.

Most of the features in the Ohio proposal duplicate existing federal laws. Enhanced state enforcement raises many legal and financial questions. What impact will this legislative package have on Ohio law enforcement, bureaucratic offices and social service agencies? What will be the costs associated with enforcing immigration law that is currently the primary responsibility of the federal government? Intergovernmental policies and laws related to federal versus state obligations should be carefully discussed and negotiated. We believe that until the federal government addresses comprehensive reform,


state responses such as the Ohio illegal alien enforcement legislation have the potential to fuel the fires of prejudice, profiling and paranoia.

We believe that our country's current immigration system is unjust. Our immigration laws have failed to keep up with the demand for labor, so those who come into the country without legal sanction are filling the need. It is our understanding that the vast majority of those who have come here illegally are working part-time or full-time and contributing to the common good of our state through the work they perform and the taxes they pay. The current immigration system can only be fixed by appropriate legislation at the federal level.

Comprehensive reform at the federal level that includes a more workable "guest worker" program and provides a viable path to citizenship for current immigrants will better enhance our nation's security and free up law enforcement personnel to focus on would-be terrorists, smugglers and other dangerous criminals. Undocumented workers in Ohio are not any more a security and safety threat to Ohioans than any other persons. We fear that local arrest authority based solely on suspected illegal entry would drive current undocumented workers further "underground". Immigrants will be less likely to report serious crimes to local authorities for fear of deportation. The Catholic Bishops in Colorado when addressing this same issue phrased it this way: *"We need to resist proposals that emphasize enforcement at the expense of real reform. Punishing criminals is justice. That's a good thing. But turning poor people who seek a dignified existence for their families into criminals in order to punish them is not justice. It's both foolish and wrong. We fully support security policies that target real threats to our peace. But that should not require that we push further into the shadows some of the very workers who are strengthening and building our country."*

In closing we reiterate our call for a statewide study commission. Thoughtful study and dialogue may help all parties to find common ground. We also encourage using state influence to help bring about comprehensive reform at the federal level. On our part, we will continue our efforts to promote greater public awareness of the positive contributions immigrants bring to Ohio communities and Ohio's economy.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Daniel E. Pilarczyk", is written over a light gray rectangular background.

Most Reverend Daniel E. Pilarczyk  
Archbishop of Cincinnati